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Thematic evaluation of lessons learned: protocols and practices

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

"Learning lessons for improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness is weak"

Summary

Pursuant to a decision by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-sixth session, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) undertook a thematic evaluation on the topic of "Lessons learned: protocols and practices". The present report identifies and assesses the systems and mechanisms for identifying, capturing, disseminating and using lessons learned in the United Nations Secretariat.

Most Secretariat programmes lack a systematic approach to the collection and use of lessons learned. To a large extent, lessons are collected and shared on an ad hoc basis. However, when activities for learning lessons have been conducted, they have been reported to have had a positive effect on enhancing programme efficiencies and effectiveness.

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Essential enabling factors for learning lessons in any organization, such as managerial support and staff incentives, are not consistently available in the Secretariat. Managerial support for learning lessons has been uneven and there are no incentives for staff to participate in activities for learning lessons. Resources and available time dedicated to learning lessons are also scarce. Coordination within and among programmes in the area of lessons learned has been limited and the main coordinating bodies of the Organization have played a minor role in that regard.

OIOS makes five recommendations to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the Department of Public Information, the Secretary-General, Secretariat programmes within the scope of the evaluation and the Office of Human Resources Management. They are:

(a) To address learning lessons in the system-wide knowledge management strategy currently being developed;

(b) To address learning lessons in the Secretariat knowledge management strategy currently being developed;

(c) To designate the Knowledge Sharing Section of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library as the Secretariat unit with responsibility for assisting learning lessons in the Organization;

(d) To develop guidelines to capture and use lessons learned in the planning and implementation of operations;

(e) To develop training on approaches and tools for learning lessons.

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I. Introduction

1. At its forty-sixth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to conduct a thematic evaluation on the topic of "Lessons learned: protocols and practices" (see A/61/16 and Corr.1, para. 370). That request was endorsed by the General Assembly in paragraph 14 of its resolution 61/235. Initially requested for submission to the Committee at its forty-eighth session, in 2008, the present report was completed in 2008 but was not presented to the Committee in that year owing to the Committee's new cycle for considering evaluations, under which the report is to be considered by the Committee at its forty-ninth session. The report was issued as an OIOS internal management report in June 2008 and OIOS has already started to follow up on the recommendations contained in the evaluation.

2. The overall objective of the present evaluation is to identify and assess the systems and mechanisms for identifying, capturing and disseminating lessons learned in United Nations Secretariat programmes.[1] As such, the evaluation examines the systems and protocols used by programmes to collect and utilize lessons, identifies significant gaps and determines the extent to which lessons learned are integrated into programme operations to enhance performance.

II. Methodology

3. In order to explore both programme-level and Secretariat-wide mechanisms for learning lessons, the scope of the present study includes 38 United Nations entities in total: 32 Secretariat programmes and six system-wide coordinating bodies (see annex).[2]

4. To conduct the evaluation, OIOS utilized the following 10 methods: (a) a self-administered, web-based survey of Secretariat programmes;[3] (b) a self-administered, web-based survey of Secretariat subprogrammes;[4] (c) a self-administered, web-based survey of Secretariat staff;[5] (d) three case studies, for

[1] For the purposes of this evaluation, the term "Secretariat programmes" refers to those programmes that receive financing, in part or in whole, from the United Nations Secretariat's regular budget and are therefore within the oversight mandate of OIOS. The term includes programmes with a substantive mandate and those with a management and support services mandate.

[2] As defined under footnote 1, OIOS identified 32 programmes within the scope of this evaluation. The International Court of Justice declined to participate in the study.

[3] Referred to as "programme survey" in the report. The survey was conducted from October to December 2007. Of 32 programmes surveyed, 25 responded, for a 78 per cent response rate.

[4] Referred to as "subprogramme survey" in the report. The survey was conducted from November to December 2007. From a total of 564 Secretariat staff at the D-1 and D-2 levels, the survey was sent to a random sample of 230. A total of 70 responses were received, for a 30 per cent response rate.

[5] Referred to as "staff survey" in the report. The survey was conducted from November to December 2007. From a total of 23,158 staff in all programmes (excluding the International Trade Centre of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Trade Organization (ITC) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for which staff lists had not been received at the time the survey was sent), the survey was sent to a random sample of 858. A total of 326 responses were received, for a 38 per cent response rate.

which a total of 25 in-depth interviews and one focus group were conducted;[6] (e) 23 in-depth interviews and one focus group with focal points, managers and staff from all Secretariat programmes (excluding those selected for case studies); (f) an analysis of programme data in the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS);[7] (g) an analysis of electronic performance appraisal system (e-Pas) work plans;[8] (h) an analysis of United Nations vacancy announcements in the Galaxy system;[9] (i) a desk review of United Nations official documents, including programme budget fascicles; and (j) a desk review of internal documents and online resources on the work done by programmes on lessons learned.

5. This evaluation methodology has several limitations. Given the broad scope of the evaluation, it was not possible to conduct an exhaustive in-depth review of all lessons learned activities in the Secretariat. Additionally, OIOS recognizes the difficulty of assessing the impact of learning lessons since, at the individual level, this is essentially a conceptual process and its results can be difficult to quantify. Also, some activities for learning lessons identified in the evaluation have been recently implemented and it is too early to assess their results.

III. Background

6. OIOS notes that there is no widely agreed definition of what constitutes "lessons learned", "best practices", or "knowledge management" in the Secretariat programmes. Thus, in this evaluation, "lessons learned" has been defined as "the knowledge or understanding gained from the implementation of a programme, subprogramme or project that is likely to be helpful in modifying and improving programme performance in the future. This knowledge is intentionally collected with the purpose of using it in the future and it includes both positive and negative lessons". The concepts of "best practice" and "knowledge management", used frequently by programmes, are closely related to lessons learned. For this evaluation, "best practice" has been defined as "the technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result in a given situation and may have applicability in another". A best practice, therefore,

[6] The three case studies were carried out on the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support (as one case study), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

[7] Programme inputs in IMDIS under the field "lessons learned" for the biennium 2006-2007 were reviewed as at 31 December 2007. From programmes that introduced inputs under this field, 25 subprogrammes were randomly selected and a detailed analysis of their submissions conducted.

[8] A total of 19,673 e-Pas documents were analysed for the 2004-2005 performance cycle, 24,322 for the 2005-2006 cycle and 28,744 for the 2006-2007 cycle. For these documents, the Office of Human Resources Management conducted a keyword search of "lessons learned", "learning lessons", "sharing lessons", "knowledge management" and "best practices". The analysis did not cover work plans of UNRWA, ITC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which have a different performance system.

[9] A total of 690 vacancy announcements posted in Galaxy on 10 October 2007, covering all levels and occupational groups, were analysed. Vacancies that included the keywords "lessons learned", "learning lessons", "sharing lessons", "knowledge management" and "best practices" were analysed by programme, occupational group and post level. The analysis did not include UNRWA, ITC and UNHCR, which announce their vacancies inuependently.

can also be seen as a positive lesson learned. For the purposes of this report, best practices are included as lessons learned. On the other hand, "knowledge management" is "the systematic creation, organization, storage and sharing of knowledge in order to better achieve organizational goals" (see E/AC.51/2006/2). A knowledge management strategy may include, inter alia, a description of "how the organization learns from projects and makes that learning accessible to people in other parts of the organization" (ibid.). Thus, the identification, collection and dissemination of lessons learned is often an important part of the knowledge management strategy in an organization.

IV. Evaluation findings

A. Most Secretariat programmes lack a systematic approach for capturing, sharing and utilizing lessons learned

7. Interview and survey data reveal that learning lessons in Secretariat programmes is not systematic. Of 25 Secretariat programmes responding to the programme survey, 16 report collecting lessons on an ad hoc basis, compared with nine that collect lessons systematically. Additionally, only one third of Secretariat programmes collect lessons mainly through formal mechanisms; the remainder rely on informal mechanisms or a combination of the two. When asked about the frequency with which lessons are collected, just over half of the programmes report collecting lessons "sometimes", one third collect them "often", and a few collect them "rarely". When asked to describe the types of activities for learning lessons they undertake, interviewees from only a few programmes report using formalized systems such as evaluations and best practice tools.

8. In line with this ad hoc approach to learning lessons, less than half of the Secretariat programmes report having a written policy or guidelines that establishes a uniform and systematic approach to the collection and use of lessons. Of the seven programmes that shared such guidelines with OIOS, five shared their monitoring and evaluation policy. Only the remaining two programmes, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, have developed a policy that outlines a system for the identification, collection, analysis and integration of good practices and lessons learned back into programme operations and establishes responsibility within the Departments to ensure the appropriate collection and use of lessons.[10]

9. Analysis of programme budget fascicles for the biennium 2006-2007 supports the conclusion that learning lessons is not systematic and has not formed an integral part of programme planning, implementation and monitoring. Terms such as "learning lessons" and "sharing lessons" rarely appear in the strategic framework section of any fascicles. In the "output" section, publications and expert group meetings are noted as disseminating best practices in various thematic areas. However, the use of these activities for learning lessons is not consistent.

[10] Department of Peacekeeping Operations policy directive (26 June 2006). For a detailed description of the peacekeeping best practices system, see the report of the Secretary-General on peacekeeping best practices (A/62/593 and Corr.1).

10. An analysis of subprogramme inputs in IMDIS for the biennium 2006-2007 also illustrates this lack of systematization. Of 221 subprogrammes, fewer than half (105) provide some type of analysis in the specific field dedicated to lessons learned. These disparities also exist at the programme level. While in 13 programmes most subprogrammes report on lessons learned, in another 11 programmes a large majority of subprogrammes do not report any lessons. Another seven programmes have just one or two of their subprogrammes reporting on lessons learned. Analysis of the information on lessons learned entered by the subprogrammes shows that, generally, the information reported does not include how the lessons could influence and enhance future programme planning. In a random sample of 25 subprogrammes reviewed, OIOS identified such analysis in only three submissions. Only in one case was there evidence of learning lessons on a continuous basis throughout the implementation of the subprogramme's programme of work.

11. Data collected through surveys and interviews point to the necessity to create more systematic processes for the identification, collection, analysis and integration of lessons learned. Respondents suggest that this greater systematization should begin by defining "best practices" and "lessons learned". When defining these concepts, their explicit applicability or domain should be specified, as lessons are context-specific and their applicability is often limited to circumstances similar to those from where they were derived. The systematization should continue with the creation of formal mechanisms to collect and share lessons within programmes and the provision of training on the use of these mechanisms.

12. Survey respondents and interviewees also suggest the need to create an overall Secretariat framework for learning lessons, together with an office or mechanism to coordinate the work of the various programmes in this area. In this regard, OIOS notes that currently there is no Secretariat-wide mechanism assigned with this function. Further, although the General Assembly in its resolution 61/235 endorsed the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination that the Secretariat Task Force on Knowledge Sharing, under the leadership of the Department of Public Information, continue to develop a Secretariat-wide knowledge management strategy, work on this strategy is still in its initial stages.

13. As noted in paragraph 6, learning lessons can be an important component of a programme's knowledge management strategy. Over the past two decades, organizations that have paid close attention to knowledge sharing have developed strategies that, among other things, outline how the institution learns and makes that learning accessible to other parts of the organization (see OIOS evaluation contained in document E/AC.51/2006/2, para. 6). However, interview and programme survey data reveal that currently only eight Secretariat programmes have a knowledge management strategy. Moreover, among these eight programmes, in at least two cases the strategy does not address learning lessons.

14. Most Secretariat programmes do not formally or regularly inform their staff about how they collect and use lessons; one third do not have activities to familiarize their staff with their activities for learning lessons. Staff survey data indicate that staff learn about how their office collects and uses lessons through informal means: by "being briefed by other colleagues" (54 per cent of respondents) or "learning by doing" (53 per cent of respondents). A total of 19 per cent of staff

surveyed said they did not know how their office captured lessons learned in the first instance.

15. Informal means are used more frequently than formal means for learning lessons in the Secretariat; personal experience and informal communication among staff are the two means most commonly used. Interview data reveal that some programmes attribute the prevalence of informal methods as the main source of learning lessons to the fact that a large majority of the staff has worked in the programme for many years. As a result of frequent interactions over time, a system of informal networks and connections develops, together with the tacit, non-written knowledge of "who knows what" in the department. Frequently, staff members that have worked in a given area of expertise for many years are informally consulted by other colleagues who want to learn about the "non-written know-how". However, OIOS notes with concern that informal sharing of lessons does not allow for these to be adequately captured and documented. Valuable knowledge and lessons can easily be lost when staff leave, move to another post or retire. This is of increasing concern within the context of the new mobility programme being implemented in the Secretariat and the large number of staff that are soon expected to retire from the Organization. Forecasts of anticipated retirements show that, within the next five years, percentages of present staff retiring from some programmes will be as high as 42 per cent (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management), 45 per cent (United Nations Office at Geneva) and 48 per cent (Office of Human Resources Management and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (see A/61/257 and Corr.1, para. 55).

B. Existing tools for learning lessons are not used to full capacity

Meetings and conferences

16. Beyond the informal means discussed above, some tools do exist for capturing, sharing and storing lessons learned. One of these is the use of ad hoc or regularly scheduled meetings and conferences, reported to be among the most widely used mechanisms for learning lessons in Secretariat programmes. These meetings and conferences may vary greatly in structure and scope. One type of meeting frequently used for learning lessons is what some programmes call "post-mortems". These are held after carrying out a certain activity to review and discuss "what went wrong and what went right" and to identify successful and unsuccessful practices. Such meetings are often used by offices responsible for organizing and servicing intergovernmental meetings and conferences. In a similar manner, ad hoc or regularly scheduled meetings are used for planning activities, where staff members bring to the discussion best practices and lessons learned through their work experience. The regularly scheduled directors meetings held by some programmes constitute another important venue for learning lessons. Through these, subprogramme heads discuss and exchange practices that can help their offices better conduct and coordinate their work. Finally, expert group meetings and international conferences bring together experts who share their knowledge in a given field, which is then collected and used to inform the planning or implementation of programme activities.

17. While meetings and conferences can facilitate a more structured discussion in which participants may share successful and unsuccessful practices, their usefulness

may vary greatly. Only if lessons identified during these discussions are adequately stored, shared and incorporated into future activities (for example, by using them to establish standards or clearer work procedures) will they help to improve programme performance. OIOS notes that if this does not occur, the usefulness of meetings is almost as limited as that of informal communication among staff: the knowledge is not stored and documented and it can easily be lost.

Evaluations

18. Evaluations, whether self-evaluations or external evaluations, are identified as another frequently used tool for learning lessons by most programmes. More than half of the Secretariat programmes have a dedicated evaluation function and others are in the process of creating one.[11] A review of evaluation policies and reports shared with OIOS reveals that the objectives of the established evaluation functions typically include documenting lessons learned, achieving greater institutional learning based on past experience, sharing knowledge and supporting strategic planning and decision-making at the programme and subprogramme levels.[12] Furthermore, some self-evaluations conducted by programmes are specific studies to collect lessons learned.[13]

19. Nevertheless, interview data and document reviews reveal that the actual use of evaluations as a source of lessons learned to achieve greater organizational learning and to influence the design, planning and implementation of programmes, subprogrammes and projects has been limited.[14] Although the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation require that "all activities programmed shall be evaluated over a fixed time period" (regulation 7.2), the extent to which evaluations are used across the Secretariat varies greatly. For the biennium 2004-2005, for example, OIOS estimated that the percentage of Secretariat subprogrammes that had undergone some form of self-evaluation or external evaluation was less than half (48 per cent).[15] Moreover, whereas some offices evaluate their own projects and activities regularly, interview data reveal that others rely exclusively on external evaluations, such as those conducted by OIOS and the Joint Inspections Unit. While external evaluations can be a useful source of good practices and lessons learned, they are not conducted frequently enough to allow for the collection of lessons learned in a regular and systematic way.[16]

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[11] Assessment of evaluation capacities and needs in the United Nations Secretariat", OIOS report No. IED-2006-006 (24 August 2007), para. 49.

[12] See, for example, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "The role of evaluation in OCHA", available at http://ochaonline.un.org/ToolsServices/EvaluationandStudies/tabid/1277/Default.aspx, and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "ESCAP monitoring and evaluation system" (21 September 2007).

[13] See, for example, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Reintegration programmes for refugees in South-East Asia: lessons learned from UNHCR's experience" (April, 2002) and "Lessons learned from the implementation of the Tanzania security package" (May, 2001).

[14] See, for example, United Nations Environment Programme, "Lessons learned from evaluation: a platform for sharing knowledge", special study paper No. 2 (January, 2007).

[15] "Assessment of evaluation capacities and needs in the United Nations Secretariat" OIOS report No. IED-2006-006 (24 August 2007), para. 38.

[16] Ibid., para. 76.

Furthermore, there is no systematic approach to controlling the quality of evaluation activities in the Secretariat.

20. Evaluations can only contribute to organizational learning if the related findings and recommendations are disseminated, discussed and acted upon. However, interview data show that subprogrammes often fail to absorb and implement lessons identified through evaluation exercises. Common obstacles to implementing these lessons are a lack of time and resources, the misperception of evaluations solely as an accountability tool rather than as a learning tool, and inadequate follow-up on the implementation of evaluation findings among programmes. The veracity and credibility of lessons learned through a single evaluation may often be questioned and only if patterns of lessons are systematically collated and referenced does their perceived reliability and capacity to influence decision-making increase. Additionally, if lessons learned as a result of an evaluation reveal systemic weaknesses that require significant decision-making by senior management, unless there is a strong commitment from management to implement changes based on experience, lessons tend to be ignored.

Programme performance planning and monitoring

21. Another mechanism used by programmes to collect and utilize lessons learned is programme performance planning and monitoring. Within the context of results-based budgeting, each Secretariat subprogramme designs its own strategic framework, which outlines overall direction and defines expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement. Upon approval of the strategic framework, the programme budget is prepared and approved by the General Assembly in December of the year preceding the biennium when it will actually be implemented. Every six months, subprogrammes are required to review the achievement of their goals and report on their progress through IMDIS, by preparing one accomplishment account for each expected accomplishment. Accomplishment accounts include a description of the activities undertaken and outputs delivered, results achieved, lessons learned and areas that need improvement. OIOS acknowledges that learning lessons should be incorporated into the implementation of results-based management as proposed in the report of the Secretary-General on the accountability framework, enterprise risk management and internal control framework, and results-based management framework (A/62/701 and Corr.1).

22. However, interview and survey data reveal the very limited role that programme performance planning and monitoring have had as mechanisms to collect and feed lessons learned into the preparation and implementation of programme operations. Of particular note is that OIOS was unable to garner any data on the specific impact of lessons learned collected through IMDIS. Several interviewees characterized the monitoring and evaluation systems in the Secretariat as still weak, and recognized that programme and subprogramme strategic planning and monitoring were not as systematic as they should be.

23. There are several reasons for the limited role of programme performance planning and monitoring in learning lessons. First of all, adequate programme planning is essential: the monitoring of programme performance is effective only if expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement that have been planned are relevant. Secondly, as noted in previous OIOS reports, the use of IMDIS and the performance data contained in it for managerial assessment and decision-making in

the programmes is still an exception rather than a rule.[17] Thirdly, under the current reporting structure, the planning for a new biennium can only use the findings of the first half of the current biennium. As interview data reflect, results of internal self-assessments and lessons learned are often not available, or they do not take place until the second year of the biennium. By the time they are available, it is often too late to feed them into planning for the upcoming biennium, creating a clear gap between the time when lessons are learned and the time they are actually incorporated into strategic planning. Additionally, strategic planning typically addresses what one management respondent called the "institutional big picture", and does not attend to the collection of explicit lessons learned, which are useful for the implementation of specific activities. Finally, even though programmes are encouraged to ensure the active involvement of staff in planning and monitoring activities to promote the sharing of experience, the preparation of strategic frameworks is often confined to a few staff members within a subprogramme and IMDIS-related training for staff is limited.

24. OIOS does note that some programmes have initiated steps to ensure that lessons are effectively incorporated into the next cycle of project and programme planning. For example, the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is trying to introduce feedback and lessons learned from actual project implementation into the project approval system through an annual project implementation review, a standard reporting form that includes a discussion on lessons learned. All project implementation reviews of a given thematic area are revised at an annual review meeting, where lessons learned through the projects are part of the discussions. Similarly, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has created programme review committees, which, among other tasks, ensure that lessons learned from previous projects are incorporated into the next generation of activities before these are approved.

Documentation

25. Another tool for learning lessons used by various programmes are reports and other documents that collect good practices and lessons learned. The regularity and formality of these documents varies greatly. Some programmes produce lessons learned reports on an ad hoc basis. For example, after holding an expert group meeting on a certain issue, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs may produce a policy paper that includes lessons learned in that field. Other programmes request their staff to produce said written reports in a more systematic manner. OIOS notes that the most organized system for the collection of lessons through documentation has been developed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support. Their knowledge sharing policy defines five types of reports: (a) end of assignment reports, which are assessments by senior staff on the implementation of their mandates; (b) after-action reviews, which are discussions of a project or action that allows a team to reflect on what happened, why it happened, what was learned, what follow-up action should be taken and how it can be done better next time; (c) handover notes, which are created by staff who

[17] See, for example, report of the Secretary-General on programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/61/64), para. 95; "Inspection of results-based management practices at ESCAP", OIOS (July, 2007); and "Inspection of results-based management practices at UNHCR", OIOS (December, 2007).

are about to leave their positions to assist their successors to carry out their duties; (d) surveys of practice, which are snapshots of how practitioners conduct a certain function or activity; and (e) lessons learned studies, which are in-depth studies on a specific activity, theme or functional area.[18] The policy also provides templates to guide staff in the preparation of these reports. These documents inform the creation of manuals and guidelines for the Departments, such as standard operating procedures and guidance notes. While mid-term reviews, after-action reviews and end of assignment reports collect lessons from a particular activity or staff member's experience, policy notes, guidance notes, manuals and standard operating procedures are of a more general nature and compile lessons from multiple experiences.

26. OIOS notes that the development of templates that collect information on best practices and lessons learned after the implementation of activities or when a staff member leaves a position does not require extensive resources; nevertheless, only a few Secretariat programmes have developed these. There is ample room for cooperation among programmes in this regard and OIOS considers that other departments could benefit from the work already conducted by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in this area. Further, in all programmes that have developed these tools, there is a lack of an accountability system to ensure that staff complete these mandatory reports.

Other tools

27. Reported as among the least-used tools for learning lessons in the Secretariat are two that have a greater reliance on information technology: databases and communities of practice.[19] Although some Secretariat programmes have been able to use databases as a very successful mechanism for the collection, exchange and use of lessons learned, interview data show that often databases have been difficult to implement, mainly owing to their need for continuous maintenance and updating and consequent need for dedicated resources. Communities of practice face a similar problem. An interviewee estimated that facilitating a community of practice in the Secretariat takes approximately 35 per cent of one staff member's time, while other agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) often dedicate one staff member full time to their maintenance. Despite this heavier reliance on resources, lessons learned databases and communities of practice have proven to be extremely useful tools for capturing, storing and sharing knowledge, as described in the following section. Thus, OIOS considers the allocation of adequate resources for the appropriate implementation of these tools is a worthwhile long-term investment.

28. OIOS notes that information technology applications currently being developed by the Secretariat offer the potential to document and share lessons learned. In particular, the enterprise content management initiative, a content management tool developed by the Department of Management, is expected to integrate all data and processes of the Organization within a unique platform, to help the Secretariat document, archive, share, search and retrieve information in a systematic and organized manner. While a few programmes have already envisaged

[18] Department of Peacekeeping Operations policy directive (26 June 2006).

[19] Communities of practice are knowledge networks that link practitioners electronically across the same areas of interest.

ways to use this initiative for learning lessons (for example the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has devised a strategy to integrate existing best practice resources into this platform) OIOS is of the opinion that all programmes could benefit from it.

C. Activities for learning lessons conducted so far are reported to have had a positive effect on enhancing operational efficiency and programme effectiveness

29. Interview and survey data reveal that activities for learning lessons conducted by Secretariat programmes to date have had a positive effect, at both the individual and organizational levels, in influencing programme operations. At the programme level, programme survey responses show that, even if collected through informal means, in nearly all programmes (94 per cent), lessons learned are "very" or "somewhat" important in guiding future activities. At the individual level, 90 per cent of staff survey respondents say that lessons learned have influenced their work. However, measuring the effect of informal activities for learning lessons is difficult. Moreover, individual learning cannot become organizational learning unless lessons are formally and systematically captured, documented and disseminated.

30. At the programme level, survey respondents report that lessons learned have had the biggest effect on fostering policy changes and introducing new policies, improving the image and reputation of the programme, introducing new work methods and approaches, increasing efficiency and effectiveness of activities and increasing client satisfaction. Lessons learned have had a similar impact at the subprogramme level, where survey data show that lessons learned have had the biggest influence in helping to plan activities, increase efficiency and effectiveness, increase the image and reputation of the subprogramme and increase client satisfaction. Finally, at the individual level, staff survey data indicate that lessons learned activities have helped staff to improve the work environment, improve knowledge sharing, foster teamwork and strengthen outputs and the efficiency of activities.

31. Interview and case study data illustrate specific examples of some formal mechanisms for learning lessons that have had a positive effect in improving the work environment and enhancing programme effectiveness. In the area of management, an activity for learning lessons that has proven particularly successful to improve the work environment has been conducted by the United Nations Office at Nairobi. After an internal evaluation highlighted some major problems between the different categories of staff, as well as between management and staff, the administration of the programme organized a series of meetings to discuss and identify good practices in the area of management. Best practices identified through this exercise were compiled in a document called "Compact of best practices", and a team comprising staff at all levels (the compact team) was created to ensure the implementation of these best practices. Several interviewees emphasized how one of the most tangible results of the compact of best practices was a more cordial atmosphere in the programme and better relations between management and staff.

32. Among all activities for learning lessons organized by the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, the communities of practice were most highly valued

by interview and focus group respondents. There are currently 10 different communities of practice in the Departments, on issues such as the rule of law, civil affairs and field management, and 15 requests for additional ones. In total, 1,451 staff members participate in them and 786 queries and replies have been exchanged since August 2005 (see A/62/593 and Corr.1, para. 30). Programme staff report that these mechanisms help them to feel part of a worldwide group that shares interests and challenges and enable them to gather information related to their work quickly. Communities of practice have also helped improve efficiency by allowing missions to reuse materials developed in other missions. For example, through a community of practice, the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire shared a safe driving training module developed in the mission, which was subsequently used by the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi and the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, allowing them to save time and resources that would have otherwise had to be allotted to the development of a new training component.

33. In the area of organization and servicing of meetings, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management provided examples of how best practices and lessons learned collected through post-mortem meetings after the High-level Plenary Meeting during the sixtieth session of the General Assembly guided the organization of the high-level event on climate change held in New York in September 2007. The Department has also produced a compendium of guidelines and best practices to help the work of the secretaries of intergovernmental meetings and, in collaboration with the Office of Legal Affairs, a manual on best practices on the interpretation of meeting rules. Departmental staff report that these documents have proven very useful to support the secretaries in conducting their work and to clarify and ensure uniform application of the rules of procedure.

34. A further example of how lessons learned have reportedly positively influenced programme operations is seen in UN-Habitat, which has a best practices database that has become a useful depository of good practices and lessons learned. Created in 1996 as a way to implement the programme's mandate to promote the work of its partners in the area of human settlements, the database is used to collect, classify and display information, in the form of case studies, on best practices in human settlements from around the world. Case studies are collected through the annual competition for the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment, offered by the municipality of Dubai. Best practices must fulfil certain criteria: they must be implemented activities that have proven successful and have had a positive and tangible impact, they must be inclusive and innovative, and they must be considerate of gender equality. All best practices submitted are reviewed by the programme and, if they meet the defined criteria, are included in the public database.

35. The UN-Habitat database is reported to have had an impact both within and outside the programme. Within the United Nations, it has been extensively used as a pool of information to illustrate trends and inform reports and conferences, and many of its practices have been quoted in publications such as the biennial state of the world's cities report and the global report on human settlements. Best practices in the area of good governance at the local level, identified through the database, were presented at the fifth Global Forum on Reinventing Government, organized with the support of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2003. Outside the realm of the United Nations, the database has become a tool to exchange

successful practices and to facilitate decentralized cooperation among groups. For example, one of the winners of the 2002-2003 Dubai award, a project created by Mother Centres International in Germany, has been replicated with successful results in other countries of the world, such as the Czech Republic, Kenya and the Philippines. Another programme, for youth in marginalized neighbourhoods initially implemented in Brazil and proven successful in reducing crime and increasing solidarity in the community, has been replicated in several cities in Latin America, also with successful results.

D. Several obstacles, including lack of management support and staff incentives which are crucial to support the attainment of lessons learned, hinder learning lessons in the Secretariat

36. Interview and survey data confirm the basic principles of organizational learning in identifying management support for learning lessons as crucial for organizations to learn lessons effectively.[20] OIOS observes that those Secretariat programmes where lessons learned activities are conducted in more systematic and formal ways are the programmes where senior management has openly conveyed its belief in the importance of learning lessons and has actively supported the development of systems and activities for learning lessons. Senior leadership plays an essential role by setting the tone at the top and sending the message to both management and staff in the programme of the importance of learning lessons. Management that supports learning lessons is more likely to dedicate resources to these activities. The senior management of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, for example, has led efforts to systematically collect and disseminate lessons learned in the programme by repeatedly addressing staff on the importance of learning to conduct operations in the Department more efficiently. When presenting the "Peace operations 2010" plan of action to all staff in the Department in 2005, for example, the Under-Secretary-General stated the need to capture the Department's collective experience and use it each time a new mission was launched or a new task undertaken.

37. The Office of Human Resources Management identifies organizational learning as one of the characteristics of an effective department and underlines the responsibility of senior management and organizational leaders in creating knowledge sharing and learning mechanisms, and in developing a learning culture in their programmes.[21] However, OIOS notes that the Office of Human Resources Management does not provide any type of support for learning lessons within the Organization; in particular, the 2008 Staff Development Programme does not offer any training related to learning lessons.[22] *The Department of Management stated that any training for learning lessons should be integrated as part of the organizational training strategy for leadership, management and organizational development. Learning lessons would be part of the training proposed to build*

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[20] Alan M. Webber, "Will companies ever learn?", *Fast Company*, No. 39 (September, 2000), p. 274.

[21] Office of Human Resources Management, "Profile of an effective manager", p. 7, and "Profile of an effective Department", p. 13.

[22] Office of Human Resources Management, *Staff Development Programme 2008*.

capacity in results management and evaluation, under the Secretary-General's proposal (see A/62/701 and Corr.1, para. 87, and Add.1).

38. OIOS also observes that management commitment to learning lessons varies greatly across the Secretariat, both within and across programmes. At the programme level, interview and survey data reveal very different levels of commitment by senior officials. In a few programmes, senior management is making obvious efforts to lead the programme in a reflective exercise to identify ways to improve procedures and processes of work. In other programmes, however, learning lessons does not appear to be a senior management priority and it is left to the initiative of subprogramme managers. Lack of time, the fact that implementing lessons learned entails making decisions that address complex systemic problems in the programme and the need for coordinating with multiple stakeholders are some of the reasons why learning lessons has been less important for senior management in many programmes.

39. Staff rating of management support to learning lessons is mixed. Among staff survey respondents, 36 per cent rate management support to the process of learning lessons as "good" or "excellent", 27 per cent say it is "fair", and 29 per cent that it is "poor" or "very poor". Interview data provide clear examples of how lessons learned that could have been useful for the planning and implementation of activities are simply disregarded by managers, and of lessons learned activities that, despite having the interest and support of staff, were discontinued owing to a lack of management support. For example, the Best Practices and Success Stories Initiative of UNEP, which was an attempt to coordinate, synthesize and disseminate successful experiences in environmental management, was discontinued because of a lack of resources and management buy-in.

40. In addition to limited management support, a further obstacle to learning lessons in the Secretariat is the lack of systems to ensure accountability in the use of lessons learned in programme design and implementation. Interview data reveal that using lessons is left to the discretion of individuals, with no disincentives or penalties to monitor and make managers and staff accountable for not using the best practices and lessons learned available to them. The new accountability framework that is currently being prepared by the United Nations Secretariat does not explicitly refer to learning lessons, although, according to staff in the Department of Management, learning lessons will be part of the new results-based management plan being proposed for the near future.

41. Despite more positive findings from survey data, information collected from interviews indicate that the Organization's culture of learning and sharing lessons needs to be further developed. According to survey data, almost half of respondents (46 per cent) describe the culture of openly reflecting on and discussing past mistakes in their programmes as "good" or "excellent", while 21 per cent says it is "fair", and 28 per cent say it is "poor" or "very poor". However, interview data further reveal that it sometimes may be difficult for programme managers, staff and stakeholders involved in the implementation of a work programme to admit mistakes. When technical assistance and policy advisory activities depend on extrabudgetary funding, programme managers fear that admitting mistakes would make future fund-raising efforts more difficult.

42. An additional difficulty in learning lessons in the Secretariat, mentioned by several survey and interview respondents, is the often politically sensitive nature of

the work conducted by its various programmes. When the core of a programme of work, for example, is to conduct political analysis, ensure policy coordination or provide intergovernmental support, the results of exercises aimed at learning lessons touch upon issues such as sovereignty and policies of Member States and may therefore not be suitable for wide, transparent dissemination. Also, when working at the country level, for example, interviewees explain that each situation is different, as mandates and dynamics with national authorities are unique.

43. A large majority of survey respondents also identify the absence of rewards and incentives as one of the major obstacles preventing the Organization from using lessons learned.[23] Among programme survey respondents, 61 per cent consider the existing rewards and incentives for learning lessons to be "poor" or "very poor" and OIOS was unable to identify any examples in the Secretariat of incentives or rewards for learning lessons. However, other agencies of the United Nations system have already started implementing such incentives. For example, to promote the active participation of staff in its exchange of best practices and experiences, the HIV network in UNDP has awarded a stipend of $2,000, which can be used for learning activities such as participation in a learning event or a visit to another country office to share experience. *The Department of Management stated it was sceptical that there was a need for incentives specifically for learning lessons. Incentives for staff and management have been proposed by the Secretary-General in a broader context to encourage overall results-orientation ... the obstacles identified by OIOS in this paragraph were being addressed in the context of the General Assembly's consideration of document A/62/701 and Corr.1 and Add.1.*

44. References to learning lessons in the Secretariat staff performance appraisal system (e-Pas) are limited. An analysis of all Secretariat e-Pas workplans from the past three performance cycles shows that only 5 per cent of plans make reference to "learning lessons", "knowledge management", or "best practices". Programmes with the highest percentage of workplans that refer to learning lessons are found among the staff of UN-Habitat (20 per cent) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (14 per cent).

E. Resources dedicated to learning lessons are very limited

45. While not aware of any established benchmarks for resources for organizational learning of lessons, OIOS observes that resources dedicated to learning lessons in the Secretariat are very limited. Among programme survey respondents, 75 per cent believe that current resources dedicated to learning lessons in their programmes are insufficient. Currently, only one third of programmes have a specific unit or group with a mandate to conduct activities for learning lessons. In the large majority of cases, the unit to which responsibilities for learning lessons have been assigned is the evaluation and monitoring function within the programme. Given the fact that the mandate to conduct activities for learning lessons is an additional mandate and that these units are usually small, the amount of actual time that these offices can dedicate to learning lessons is very limited.

[23] Incentives for learning lessons can include public recognition of staff, recognition through performance appraisals or stipends.

46. Moreover, only 2 out of 25 programmes have financial resources specifically dedicated to activities for learning lessons: the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, for which, following the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, the General Assembly agreed to resource a reconfigured capability for learning lessons and developing policy in the form of the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section (see A/62/593 and Corr.1, para. 4). Resources assigned to this Section include 6 full-time Professional level posts. In addition, 10 peacekeeping missions have Best Practices Officers. The aforementioned assets are used to develop the overall framework of peacekeeping policy guidance and to create, implement and coordinate best practice tools and activities for the two Departments, which consist of 100,000 field personnel and 650 headquarters staff (ibid., para. 12). *The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) noted that resource availability to conduct activities for learning lessons at the departmental level was a serious issue. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations noted that [the implementation of systems and activities for learning lessons] were not resource-neutral proposals but would help the Organization to perform more efficiently in the long run, based on well-documented and accessible knowledge in all programme areas.*

47. As previously mentioned, technological resources for learning lessons are equally absent. Only 5 out of 25 programmes have specific technical support for conducting activities for learning lessons. OIOS notes that the best practices database of UN-Habitat has only been sustainable because of the ability of programme staff to obtain the assistance of external stakeholders and donors for funding. Specific website or Intranet pages dedicated to lessons learned, lessons learned databases, communities of practices and statistical software packages are among the most common technological tools used for the collection and dissemination of lessons learned outside the United Nations and these are largely absent in the Secretariat.

48. The amount of time that staff dedicate to lessons learned activities is also very limited. Staff survey results reveal that, based on responses to a question asking how much of their time staff members dedicate to activities for learning lessons, the average time a staff member spends on these activities is nine hours per month. However, there are significant differences in the distribution of time: while 10 per cent of respondents report spending between 20 and 50 hours per month learning lessons, 58 per cent of staff dedicate less than five hours a month. Interview data indicate that activities for learning lessons often require additional efforts beyond an already quite heavy workload.

49. The scarce amount of time that Secretariat staff devote to learning lessons is partly related to the fact that, for a large majority, learning lessons is not part of their job description.[24] An analysis of vacancy announcements in the United Nations Galaxy system reveals that terms such as "lessons learned", "learning lessons", "sharing lessons", "knowledge management" and "best practices" appear in only 9 per cent of all vacancies. Important differences can be observed among programmes and occupational groups. While in programmes such as the Economic Commission for Africa, ESCWA and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations these terms are used in 33 per cent of all announcements, other programmes do not

[24] OIOS acknowledges that "commitment to continuous learning" is a competency often included in vacancy announcements.

make reference to learning lessons in any of their vacancies.[25] Among occupational groups, administration, information systems and technology, programme management and logistics are among the ones that most often refer to learning lessons, while none of the posts in the fields of civil affairs, engineering or information management do so.

F. Coordination among programmes in learning lessons is limited, and existing Secretariat coordinating bodies play only a minor role in facilitating the sharing of lessons among programmes

50. OIOS notes that, overall, there is a low level of coordination in the area of learning lessons among Secretariat programmes. Survey and interview data indicate that most programmes do not systematically share lessons with other programmes. While programme survey data show that 40 per cent of programmes exchange lessons with other United Nations entities and 27 per cent with entities outside the United Nations, interview data reveal that the sharing of lessons across programmes typically occurs in an ad hoc manner. As a result, each programme, and very often each subprogramme, creates and implements its own activities for learning lessons. While some subprogrammes have developed useful systems and activities for learning lessons, the lack of coordination and exchange of information precludes others within the same programme or in other programmes from benefiting from these efforts.

51. Interviewees identify the lack of time and the distinct identity of each programme and subprogramme as the main challenges to coordination in learning lessons. The identification of what can be useful for another programme or subprogramme that operates in a different area, and sometimes with different guiding principles, working arrangements and external stakeholders, is viewed as a difficult task. Collaboration with United Nations entities outside the Secretariat is often considered an even more difficult undertaking, as these have different administrative systems, programme processes and policies.

52. OIOS further notes that most of the six United Nations coordinating bodies reviewed play a very limited role in Secretariat-wide coordination in the area of lessons learned. Interview data indicate that, occasionally, the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) may have discussions in which experiences in various substantive topics are shared by meeting participants; however, these exchanges are limited and do not take place regularly. In the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, which organizes its work through thematic clusters, there is some exchange of lessons within the clusters, but due to the lack of a dedicated secretariat, these exchanges are limited and ad hoc. Heads of the Executive Committee entities exchange good practices and lessons learned when they regularly consult with one another on policy issues, work programmes and other matters of concern. While recognizing the potential usefulness of these coordinating bodies for learning lessons, respondents highlight potential obstacles that would need to be overcome for the coordinating bodies to better facilitate learning lessons. These obstacles include the

[25] However, for posts in field missions administered by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, vacancy announcements refer to these terms in only 9 per cent of cases.

need to define what to learn and the need to ensure accountability for feeding lessons into a new cycle of implementation of activities, the large membership of the Committees and the range of intergovernmental mechanisms to which they report.

53. The Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Policy Committee do not conduct any coordination activities in the area of lessons learned and respondents from these Committees state that their mandates preclude them from being an appropriate forum for the exchange of lessons. In the case of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, this is because another forum, the Inter-agency Standing Committee, which brings together United Nations entities and external partners working in humanitarian affairs, better facilitates such exchanges. The Policy Committee, being a forum to assist the Secretary-General in decision-making, focuses its attention on strategic guidance and policy decisions on thematic and country-specific issues affecting the Organization, rather than operational aspects of work.

54. In contrast, the United Nations Development Group has a very different mandate and plays a much bigger role in learning lessons. Supported by a well-staffed secretariat, its main mission is to provide guidance on how to work together in a country team setting and how to improve the effectiveness of the United Nations system's development activities. Guidance materials issued by this body are therefore formulated on the basis of stocktaking and exercises for learning lessons conducted through joint efforts by the member agencies of the Group.

55. CEB, as the system-wide coordinating forum, has a number of mechanisms for learning lessons that mostly emphasize sharing information and avoiding duplication. The High-level Committee on Management, which is supported by several specialized networks such as the Inter-Agency Security Management Network, and the High-level Committee on Programmes are attended regularly by programme heads to discuss management and programme issues of relevance to the whole United Nations system. In addition, CEB hosts five networks for which membership is system wide; each network is chaired by senior agency staff. While interview data reveal that the sharing of unsuccessful experiences and failures can be difficult at this high level, the knowledge exchange environment that these networks provide allows for linkages between agencies on subjects of common interest. Furthermore, network websites provide a platform for sharing experiences and broadcasting messages to the entire network.

V. Conclusion

56. Learning lessons for improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness is weak. OIOS has identified important limitations in how most Secretariat programmes learn lessons and use these lessons to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their work. In order to benefit from the knowledge that exists within the Organization and to learn from mistakes and successes, programmes need to develop efficient systems and tools to capture, document and share lessons learned and to effectively integrate lessons back into planning and operations. Existing tools for learning lessons are not fully adequate and a genuine culture of knowledge sharing and learning from experience, with senior management support and staff incentives, does not consistently permeate the Organization. Specific allocation of

resources to activities for learning lessons, together with increased sharing of lessons among Secretariat programmes, are also imperative to help the Organization to better achieve its goals. OIOS notes that proposals to address some of these obstacles are presented in the report of the Secretary-General on the Secretariat's accountability framework, enterprise risk management and internal control framework, and results-based management framework (A/62/701 and Corr.1). OIOS concludes that lessons are lost forever if there are no formal mechanisms to capture them, and that this is a resource the Organization cannot afford to ignore.

VI. Recommendations

57. OIOS makes five recommendations for strengthening the work of the United Nations in the area of lessons learned. These recommendations are addressed to the two task forces on knowledge sharing that currently exist in the United Nations (one at the United Nations system-wide level and the other at the Secretariat-wide level), the Secretary-General, the 32 programmes within the scope of this study and the Department of Management.[26] OIOS notes that the Department of Management, in its comments, stated that the Secretary-General agrees with the thrust of these recommendations. However, the Department commented that it has proposed the establishment of a central results-based management capacity unit that could coordinate activities for learning lessons as part of support for results-based management and could engage in capacity-building and training on the use of lessons learned as part of results-based management (see A/62/701 and Corr.1).

Recommendation 1
United Nations system strategy for learning lessons

58. **CEB should request its existing system-wide Knowledge Sharing Task Force to address the issue of learning lessons when developing a United Nations system-wide knowledge management strategy (as recommended in E/AC.51/2006/2, para. 72, endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/235, para. 14)**[27] (see chap. IV, finding A). In particular, the CEB Task Force should:

(a) Include a common basic understanding of what "lessons learned" and "best practices" are and why are they important;

(b) Provide an overall description of how the United Nations system learns from its activities and makes that learning accessible to all entities in the system;

(c) Promote inter-agency coordination in developing, sharing, facilitating and guiding activities for learning lessons in the United Nations system;

(d) Work in close collaboration with the Secretariat Task Force on Knowledge Sharing responsible for ensuring that lessons learned are addressed in the Secretariat-wide knowledge management strategy to guarantee coordination and avoid duplication of efforts.

[26] OIOS recognizes that, in addition to learning lessons, there are other important elements in a knowledge management strategy that warrant equal attention.

[27] Implementation status of this recommendation as at February 2009 is "ongoing".

OIOS recognizes that the work of the CEB Task Force would result in a general framework that would need to be adapted at the programme level to meet programme-specific needs and objectives.

Recommendation 2
Secretariat-wide strategy for learning lessons

59. **The Department of Public Information should request its existing Secretariat Task Force on Knowledge Sharing, under the leadership of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, to address the issue of learning lessons when developing a United Nations Secretariat-wide knowledge management strategy (as recommended in E/AC.51/2006/2, para. 72, endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/235, para. 14)**[28] (see chap. IV, finding A). *The Department of Public Information stated that no budgetary allocations had been earmarked for these activities and services. These would include increased contact with offices away from Headquarters to create a network of focal points, the use of new technological applications, specialized expertise and retraining of staff. Innovation and change require an investment; there should be a recognition that this work cannot be carried out within the Department's current budget.* In particular, the Secretariat Task Force should:

(a) Include a common basic understanding of what "lessons learned" and "best practices" are and why are they important;

(b) Provide an overall description of how the United Nations Secretariat learns from its activities and makes that learning accessible to Secretariat programmes;

(c) Facilitate the coordination efforts among United Nations system entities in sharing lessons learned;

(d) Work in close collaboration with the system-wide CEB Knowledge Sharing Task Force responsible for ensuring that lessons learned are addressed in the system-wide knowledge management strategy to guarantee coordination and avoid duplication of efforts.

OIOS recognizes that the work of the Secretariat Task Force would result in a general framework that would need to be adapted at the programme level to meet programme-specific needs and objectives.

Recommendation 3
Dedicated Secretariat office for assisting learning lessons

60. **The Secretary-General, when considering designation of the Knowledge Sharing Section of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library as the lead Secretariat unit with responsibility for developing, encouraging, facilitating and guiding knowledge sharing activities in the Secretariat (as recommended in E/AC.51/2006/2, para. 75, endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/235, para. 14),**[29] **should ensure that this Section is also the dedicated unit for capacity-building for learning lessons in the Secretariat** (see chap. IV, finding A). *The Department of Public Information stated that no budgetary allocations had*

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

been earmarked for these activities and services. These would include increased contact with offices away from Headquarters to create a network of focal points, the use of new technological applications, specialized expertise and the retraining of staff. Innovation and change require an investment; there should be a recognition that this work cannot be carried out within the Department's current budget. In collaboration with the Information Technology Services Division, the Knowledge Sharing Section should be tasked with:

(a) Developing and sharing generic tools and protocols for capturing and disseminating good practices and lessons learned;

(b) Collecting and disseminating examples of incentives for managers and staff to learn lessons, of ways to ensure accountability in the use of lessons learned and of how programmes may use the new enterprise content management system for learning lessons;

(c) Creating and maintaining a Secretariat website on learning lessons and other issues as appropriate, with guidance, tools, good practices and tips;

(d) Providing guidance and support to programmes for learning lessons.

OIOS recognizes that there is a need for flexibility in addressing individual programmes need, but considers that the Knowledge Sharing Section can play an important role with regard to promoting, as appropriate, consistency, coordination and harmonization of Secretariat tools, activities and mechanisms for learning lessons.

Recommendation 4
Guidelines for learning lessons at the programme level

61. **Secretariat programmes within the scope of this evaluation should develop guidelines for learning lessons that establish a framework for identifying, documenting and disseminating best practices and lessons learned, as well as using these lessons when planning and implementing programme operations and activities.** Learning lessons need not be a separate system, but can be integrated into existing relevant systems. Thus, programmes can establish guidelines through policies for knowledge management and learning lessons, as well as through other relevant systems or procedures, such as, for example, an evaluation policy (see chap. IV, finding A). *UNCTAD stated its reservation to introducing a "separate" policy for learning lessons at this stage and also considered that implementation of such a policy would be resource dependent. The Department of Management stated that the implementation of this recommendation would be addressed in the context of the Secretary-General's proposed results-based management framework, pending General Assembly consideration. Resource allocations for learning lessons at the programme level should be seen as part of the dedication of resources for monitoring and evaluation.*

Taking into account specific characteristics of programmes such as size, budget and mandate, the guidelines for learning lessons should take into account the following aspects:

(a) Based on the basic definition developed at the system-wide and Secretariat levels, further elaboration of programme-specific definitions of "lessons

learned" and "best practices" and their applicability within the context of the work of the programme;

(b) Tools used by the programme to identify, collect, document and share best practices and lessons learned, including improving existing tools;

(c) Procedures or mechanisms to feed best practices and lessons learned back into programme operations and activities;

(d) Responsibilities for the overall coordination of the lessons learned system within the programme;

(e) Training on the use of tools for learning lessons that will be provided to programme staff;

(f) Resources allocated to learning lessons;

(g) Incentives provided to staff to promote the collection, dissemination and use of lessons learned;

(h) Specific measures to ensure accountability of management and staff in following procedures outlined in the policy on learning lessons and in taking lessons learned into account when planning or implementing activities.

Secretariat programmes that have already developed a policy on learning lessons should ensure that all the above-mentioned issues are addressed in that policy.

Recommendation 5
Training and capacity-building

62. OIOS notes the proposal of the Secretary-General (see A/62/701 and Corr.1) to create a new section in the Department of Management that would be responsible for implementing results-based management and for supporting the monitoring and evaluation capacity within the Secretariat. Should the General Assembly approve the creation of this new section, **the new section, together with the Office of Human Resources Management of the Department of Management, should contribute to capacity development in the area of learning lessons in the Secretariat by developing, within the Secretariat's staff development and training programme, training on approaches and tools for learning lessons. Should this new section not be approved, the Office of Human Resources Management should develop the above-mentioned training** (see chap. IV, finding D). *The Department of Management noted that in order to implement this recommendation, it would require additional resources.*

(*Signed*) Inga-Britt **Ahlenius**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

23 January 2009

Annex

United Nations Secretariat programmes within the scope of the evaluation

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Department of Field Support
Department for General Assembly and Conference Management
Department of Management
Department of Political Affairs
Department of Public Information
Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Department of Safety and Security
Economic Commission for Africa
Economic Commission for Europe
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
Executive Office of the Secretary-General
International Trade Centre, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development/World Trade Organization
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Office for Disarmament Affairs
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
Office of Internal Oversight Services
Office of Legal Affairs
Office for Outer Space Affairs
Office of the Special Adviser on Africa
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
United Nations Environment Programme
United Nations Human Settlements Programme
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
United Nations Office at Geneva
United Nations Office at Nairobi
United Nations Office at Vienna

United Nations coordinating committees within the scope of the evaluation

Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs
Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
Executive Committee on Peace and Security
Policy Committee
United Nations Development Group
United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination